

OLD ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Choir Policies and Procedures

A. Mission & Vision

1. The choirs of Old St. Mary's exist to glorify God and edify His people by providing music for liturgical celebrations and devotional exercises that strives to be worthy of the temple of God, in conformity with the mind of the Church, standing firmly within the received tradition of Catholic sacred music.
2. We are also conscious of the historic space in which we are privileged to sing God's praise, and that we are stewards and custodians of a program of musical excellence that is a significant religious and cultural asset to the city and the region.
3. We are aware that singing for the sacred liturgy in a ministerial capacity is a privilege and an honor, not an entitlement or right, and we cultivate gratitude for that privilege through our thorough preparation and a spirit of humility and service.

B. The Choirs

1. *The Choir of the Cincinnati Oratory* is a fully-auditioned, mixed professional / volunteer choir that serves as the primary choral voice of Old St. Mary's, singing for the High Mass on Sundays and the greater number of feast days throughout the year. The Choir of the Cincinnati Oratory rehearses weekly from 7-9p on Thursdays from the last week of September through the middle of June, as well as an hour before most liturgies sung, and is directed by the Director of Sacred Music.
2. *The Oratory Singers* are a smaller ensemble, comprised of the professional section leaders of the choir and supplemented as necessary by selected volunteer members chosen for voice type and timbre at the Director of Music's sole discretion. The Oratory Singers rehearse independently from the full choir only as necessary, and sing the High Mass for selected feast days, solemn Vespers, and the Musical Oratories, under the direction of the the Director of Sacred Music.
3. *Laudate Pueri*, The Schola Cantorum of the Cincinnati Oratory, is an auditioned treble choir of children primarily from Old St. Mary's and Sacred Heart, but drawing from the entire region, mostly between the ages of 8 and 14 years. They sing for selected liturgies throughout the year, and assist at the Musical Oratory of Advent. The *Schola* rehearse weekly on Wednesday afternoons from 4.15-5.35p from the end of August through mid-May. This is directed by the Director of Music.
4. *The Saint Philip Neri Choristers* are a group of around 12-15 trebles auditioned from within *Laudate Pueri* that rehearse for an additional 40 minutes each week and sing alongside the Choir of the Cincinnati Oratory / Oratory Singers for Sunday Mass and other significant liturgies at Old St. Mary's multiple times per month, in the tradition of a chorister program.
4. *The German Choir* sings at the 11.30a German Mass on Sundays, rehearsing on an intermittent basis.

C. Membership & Auditions

1. Prospective members of the choir should contact the Director of Music to schedule an audition, and give him an idea of their vocal and choral experience, as well as their motivation to join the choir and any availability issues.
2. Auditions will be heard at a mutually convenient time, and new members will be accepted at the sole discretion of the Director of Sacred Music based upon demonstrated skill and communicated availability.
3. Prospective members may be excluded if they significantly indicate a lack of the necessary attitude or disposition to succeed as contributing members of the ensemble.
4. Choir members are not empowered to extend an offer of membership in the choir to others. Prospective or interested vocalists communicating with current members of the choir should be directed to contact the Director of Sacred Music directly.

C. Safe Environment

1. All volunteer and professional singers at Old St. Mary's are expected to conduct themselves at all times in accordance with the norms set forth in the Archbishop's Decree on Child Protection. All professional singers must be background checked, fingerprinted, and remain up-to-date on Safe Parish training as per Archdiocesan human resources policy, and volunteers are expected to undertake training etc. in the ways deemed necessary by the Pastor.
2. Violation of Safe Environment policy is cause for immediate removal from the choir and, in the case of professional vocalists, can flag one's account within the Archdiocese, affecting future employment opportunities.
3. Generally speaking, the choir room is only to be used by members of the choir for official purposes during regularly-scheduled rehearsals, warm-ups, & socials. If you wish to use the room for another purpose, you need to ask the Director of Sacred Music.

D. Expectations of Conduct for Vocalists

1. All vocalists, professional and volunteer, are expected to conduct themselves on church property and during the course of church events in a way that reflects the moral teaching of the Catholic Church and promotes the virtue of faith and, especially in liturgy and devotional events, a spirit of reverence and prayerfulness in the house of God. Choir members are expected to treat other members of the choir with courtesy and respect, and to observe personal (and in the case of section leaders, professional) boundaries at all times. They are expected to treat our spaces (the rehearsal room and gallery) with respect. Serious lapses in these areas may be grounds for removal from the choir.
2. **Professional vocalists** are expected to conduct themselves as exemplary members of the choir. They are to be models of promptness and docility in their conduct and attendance at rehearsal and liturgy, and they should plan to review and rehearse the scheduled music that is available to them prior to choir practices, and as may prove necessary following practice, to ensure that the singers they support can lean on them with full confidence, and that the Director can rely upon them.
3. Assignments for cantoring and solo work, which will be primarily given to the professional vocalists, will be given in as timely a fashion as possible, bearing in mind that fluidity and flexibility are unavoidable aspects of practical church music. Soloists and cantors who have received their assignments with sufficient lead time are expected to prepare their parts to the point that spending rehearsal time on them beyond a single run-through is not necessary.
4. Occasional lapses are human. A recurring lack of preparedness or promptness in choral or solo work that indicates a pattern will be addressed individually first informally, then formally, and, if chronic, can end with termination.
5. Our paid sections are all staffed with redundancy, and professional vocalists who need to be absent for good cause should make a habit of checking (both on the attendance spreadsheet and directly with their section-mate) to ensure that their voice part is covered by another professional. All desired absences should be communicated as early as possible to the Director of Sacred Music for approval (which is ordinarily given if possible). If it is necessary to find an outside substitute, ordinarily the Director will contract the substitute voice. Assistance in doing so will sometimes be solicited.
6. **Volunteer vocalists** are expected to conduct themselves as dedicated members of the choir. They should be as prompt as possible for rehearsals and liturgies, and communicate any absences or tardiness as necessary to the Director of Music. They should conduct themselves with docility and diligence in the preparation of their music, and be honest and open about any difficulties they are facing so these can be accommodated and addressed to maximize the musical success of the group and everyone's musical growth.
7. Detailed expectations for singers in the children's program & their parents are found in the *Laudate Pueri* handbook.

E. Communication

1. The primary mode of communication for the choir is bcc'd group E-mail. Generally speaking, individual events and topics will receive their own E-mail threads to keep communication as clear as possible, even at the expense of multiplying the volume of E-mails received. It is the responsibility of choir members to read E-mails and note schedule or repertoire changes in their own preparation, and to communicate new conflicts as necessary. All official correspondence should be directed to the Director by E-mail at sconnolly@oldstmarys.org.
2. A full season calendar will be distributed for planning purposes prior to the first rehearsal, but this is, of course, subject to change as necessary, and is not a substitute for keeping current with the E-mail communications.
3. Professional vocalists are **required**, and volunteer vocalists are strongly encouraged, to share known absences on the shared attendance spreadsheet. This will help the Director of Music to plan music and hire substitutes effectively.

F. Music Distribution and Filing

1. The distribution and retention of music is an evolving procedure. At the moment, singers should know that, regardless of whether they have received digital copies of scores, all printed scores necessary, and binders, will be provided for them.
2. Each singer in the Choir of the Cincinnati Oratory will have a cubby in the choir room for music distribution and as a place to keep their binder and other materials. This should be kept tidy; catechism students will be in our room each week.
3. After their last immediate liturgical use, distributed materials should be taken out of the binder laid out, sorted, in the pews in the loft for filing as directed.

G. Professional-Specific Matters

1. Onboarding and payroll documents will be provided on hiring and must be completed by the new hire before payroll can be processed. *N.B. - Backpay for calls sung prior to receipt of these documents by the parish office, and Safe Parish training / background check approval, is no longer possible. You will not get paid for calls until paperwork is submitted, and you will never be paid for calls sung prior to your completion of the paperwork.*
2. Employees on payroll will be paid in two week intervals by direct deposit. Payment is on a per-call basis at agreed-upon fixed rates, regardless of the relative length of similar calls week to week. These records are available to you on request.
3. Singers and instrumentalists receiving pay on a more intermittent basis will receive a form I099 that must be completed prerequisite to their receiving payment. These musicians will be paid by check on a call-by-call basis.
4. Our professional roster receives preferential opportunity to sing for all parish weddings. An E-mail thread indicating the date and time of the wedding, and the voice parts requiring coverage, will be sent to all members on the roster, and parts will be filled on a first-come, first-serve basis. Should our professional roster be unable to cover a wedding, outside help will be sought.
5. Funerals, as rare and personal events that cannot be foreseen, will be handled by individual communications with vocalists, typically those requested specifically by the bereaved. If an open call is required for a choral funeral, it will be handled by E-mail thread on a first-come, first-served basis, like weddings.

H. Loose Ends

1. A music program is a complex and dynamic reality, and it would be miraculous if a document like this could foresee every eventuality. Any questions that remain should be brought to the Director of Sacred Music. Generally speaking, however, common sense and goodwill will go a long way to resolving whatever questions may remain.

Sean Connolly, Director of Sacred Music. August 19, 2025